

## The Work of Christ

The work of Christ matches His person; that is, it is unique and a profound mystery. It is a work above all others in its importance to us. His work may be summarised in one glorious word: *redemption*. The word comes from the verb *to redeem*, which means “to buy back.” His is the work of buying us back from the terrible consequences of our sin, namely, from slavery to sin, death, the devil, and hell. That work is so important, so beautiful for contemplation, and so beneficial to us that the Lord in His Word has found a number of ways of presenting it to us.

That we need to be redeemed should be evident to all. We are creatures. God made us. He made us to reflect His glory with lives that happily submit to Him in every thought, word, and deed. That’s what we owe Him just by virtue of the fact that He made us. That’s what we owe Him as well because of the incomparable generosity of His gifts to us our whole life long. He gives us not only life but also a measure of health and wealth. He gives us time and the energy to fill the time with the pleasures of a beautiful world, the satisfaction of work and play, and the enjoyment of family and friends. Luther summarises it so well in his explanation to the First Article in the Small Catechism. All that we are and have are His. All that we are and have comes from Him because He loves us and wants us to enjoy serving Him. All that we have is altogether from His goodness apart from any merit or worthiness in us. So, yes, we owe Him. We owe Him a willing, eager, and happy submission to His Word and will. We owe Him perfect obedience - nothing less.

However, as we have noted so often already, we have not paid that debt, no, not even for a minute. He has yet to receive from any of us a single moment of what we owe Him, of perfect love and obedience, an obedience by which we “fear, love, and trust in Him above all things” - as the Small Catechism sums it up in the explanation to the First Commandment. As a result then of a debt we can never even begin to pay, we merit nothing but His wrath and punishment.

But can’t we do something to redeem ourselves? Can’t we pay the price of past guilt by being perfect from now on? Even if that were possible, we still would not redeem ourselves. For the minimum required by the Law of God and by His justice is perfection in every moment of our existence. Even if we were perfect from now on (a laughable impossibility!), that would pay nothing on the debt owed; it would merely keep the debt from growing.

What then should the price be for our redemption, the price of our purchase from the punishment we deserve not only in this life but for all eternity? No matter what the price, some might think that it would be nothing for Jesus, the God-man, to pay it. After all, there is nothing created that He does not own, rule, and control. Nothing and no one, not all the evil in the world combined, can overpower Him. Death could not hold on to Him. The devil himself is under His heel, and hell has no power over Him. The work of redemption therefore should not be difficult for so mighty and rich a Prince as He.

And exactly therein lays the profound mystery. Not all the wealth and power of the world, all of which He possesses, could redeem us. The price was too great for mere created things to be of any use at all in paying it. The Bible tells us plainly, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him,” (Psalm 49:7). The price of redemption was so great that only the God-man Himself could pay it, and that not with things created but only with and in His own person. The price would not be bargain basement cheap or easy, no, not even for Him. It was most costly. St. Peter sums it up when he tells us that “it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect,” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus Himself reveals the price when He tells us, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to

serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many,” (Mark 10:45).

Thus, the price would not be a price of things. It would be the price of a person, the person of the God who became man precisely so that He could pay the price of our redemption with His own blood, His own suffering, and His own death. Outside of the Bible itself, perhaps no one has summed up the work of Christ more beautifully and exactly than Martin Luther in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. All this He did that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

